

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
CHILD FATALITY REVIEW PANEL**

**Co-Chair Sarah Healy Eagan, JD**  
**Child Advocate**  
**State of Connecticut**

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**TESTIMONY FROM THE STATE'S CHILD FATALITY REVIEW PANEL CO-CHAIRS  
COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN  
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2022**

Senator Anwar, Representative Linehan, Senator Kelly, Representative Dauphinais, and all distinguished members of the Committee on Children, this testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Office of the Child Advocate (“OCA”) and Dr. Kirsten Bechtel, and emergency department pediatrician from Yale New Haven Hospital, in our role as co-chairs of the state’s Child Fatality Review Panel. The obligations of the OCA are to review, investigate, and make recommendations regarding how our publicly funded state and local systems meet the needs of vulnerable children. The Child Fatality Review Panel (“CFRP”) established pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. Sec. 46a-13/ requires the panel to review the circumstances of sudden/unexpected child deaths and “facilitate prevention strategies to address identified trends and patterns of risk and to improve coordination of services for children and families in the state.”

**H.B. No. 5155 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE SAFE STORAGE OF CANNABIS, CANNABIS PRODUCTS AND PRESCRIPTION DRUGS.**

OCA strongly supports the provisions in this bill to require child-resistant packaging of cannabis products, as well as public health information and other documentation from Consumer Protection regarding “safe storage” of cannabis and prescription drug.

It is essential that “consumer health materials” and warnings referenced in the proposed bill are explicit regarding the dangers of accident ingestion or overdose of cannabis and other substances by children. The bill language could be amended to be clear regarding these expectations.

Cannabis ingestions in children have been increasing over the past several years in Connecticut, since Massachusetts made the sale of cannabis legal in 2019. Since then, cannabis ingestions/exposures by children and adolescents that were reported to the Connecticut Poison Control Center have increased by 350%. The majority of these exposures were accidental, meaning that the children inadvertently consumed these products, usually in the form of edibles (e.g., gummies, chocolate).

Children younger than 5 years old who consume cannabis are most likely to be symptomatic and require hospital care. Even a small exposure of a cannabis-containing product can lead to significant symptoms in children, due to their lower body weight. As many edible products are packed as candies and chocolates, children may consume multiple pieces - leading to very serious symptoms. Ingestion

of THC in children can lead to a wide range of serious medical consequences, including coma and seizure.

Safeguards in the Connecticut Cannabis Law are common sense, such as setting dose and serving size limits, clearly demarking what a single serving and the use of child resistant, individually wrapped, white opaque packaging. However, if these are stored in a way that are still accessible to children, these safeguards may be moot. Thus, a public health campaign focused on caregiver education about safe storage of cannabis products is essential.

On a related note, we wanted to share with the Committee that ingestion, intentional or unintentional, of substances by children of all ages is a significant factor in circumstances leading to the preventable deaths of children in the state, regardless of whether a child's death is found to be due to overdose of that substance. For example, preliminary data from 2021 reveals that of 106 child fatalities reviewed by the CFRP, 35 children had illicit substances (including alcohol) in their bodies at the time of death. At this time, 7 of those children's' deaths, ages ranging from 4 weeks old to 17-year-old, have been determined to be from overdose (most commonly Fentanyl) with manner of death determinations by the Medical Examiner including Homicide, Accident, and Suicide. The remaining deaths of children where children had ingested alcohol or substances prior to death were often found to be accidental (typically due to motor vehicle accident) or the result of a gun shot injury (homicide).

We look forward to working with you to prevent further cannabis ingestions by children in Connecticut.

Respectfully submitted,  
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